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Canyons & Valley Edition
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July/August 2009

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Above: A mid-century modern motif calls for mirrored elements like this silvery backsplash, which complements the soft grays and cool whites in a newly remodeled kitchen. "My trademark is doing a contemporary space but making it very warm and inviting, then using a mix of materials," says the home's designer, Erinn Valencich. Photo by Jamie K. Fisher

On the cover: Valencich and New York City architect Christopher Richartz collaborated in designing a vacation home in Beverly Hills that offers ample space for entertaining, inside and out. Photo by Adrian Anz.

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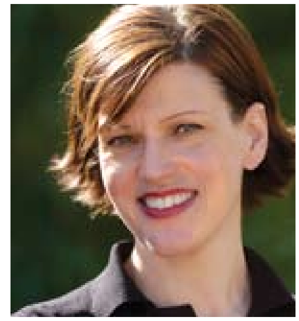


Anyone who has ever modernized their kitchen, renovated a bathroom or even repainted a room knows the angst and turmoil inherent in a home-remodeling project. At the first missed deadline or mismatched color, it's tempting to just throw up our hands and walk away. That's why we have such respect for the creative–and tenacious–forces who orchestrated the remodels of the stunning vacation retreats showcased in *Spaces'* "Second Homes" issue. Though vastly different in character and style, the homes exemplify the union of imagination and attention to detail that create a sanctuary for the owner to live in and love. Designer Erinn Valencich provides a professional's perspective of the inside-and-out renovation, while Debbi and Steve Lenzi offer a personal view of how they created their dream home. As in every issue, we bring you the latest in fabulous furnishings and unique accessories along with fun suggestions for summer entertaining. We hope these ideas will inspire and energize you to create your own dream home–one that fits you and your loved ones perfectly.



Have a good story idea to share? Comments about the magazine? Write to me at spaceseditor@langnews.com.

contributors



Sandra Barrera loves talking about design, so she was excited for the opportunity to chat about new trends with HGTV's Erinn Valencich. Sandra has had the privilege of visiting many beautiful homes as a staff writer for the *Los Angeles Daily News*, where she's covered design, fashion and entertainment since 2000.



Sue Doyle lives for adventures. She gets to fulfill this need as a reporter for the *Los Angeles Daily News*, where her job sends her out to cover mayhem on the streets and into the lives of some truly amazing people. In her free time, she loves to find shops and restaurants that are off the beaten path.



Dean Musgrove thrives on the range of assignments he's experienced and diversity of the people he's met during his career as a photographer. He grew up in the San Fernando Valley and was an award-winning photographer for the *Herald Examiner*, covering news, entertainment and sports events. He is now director of photography at the *Los Angeles Daily News*.

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SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA
spaces
Volume 2 • Issue 4 spacesmag.com

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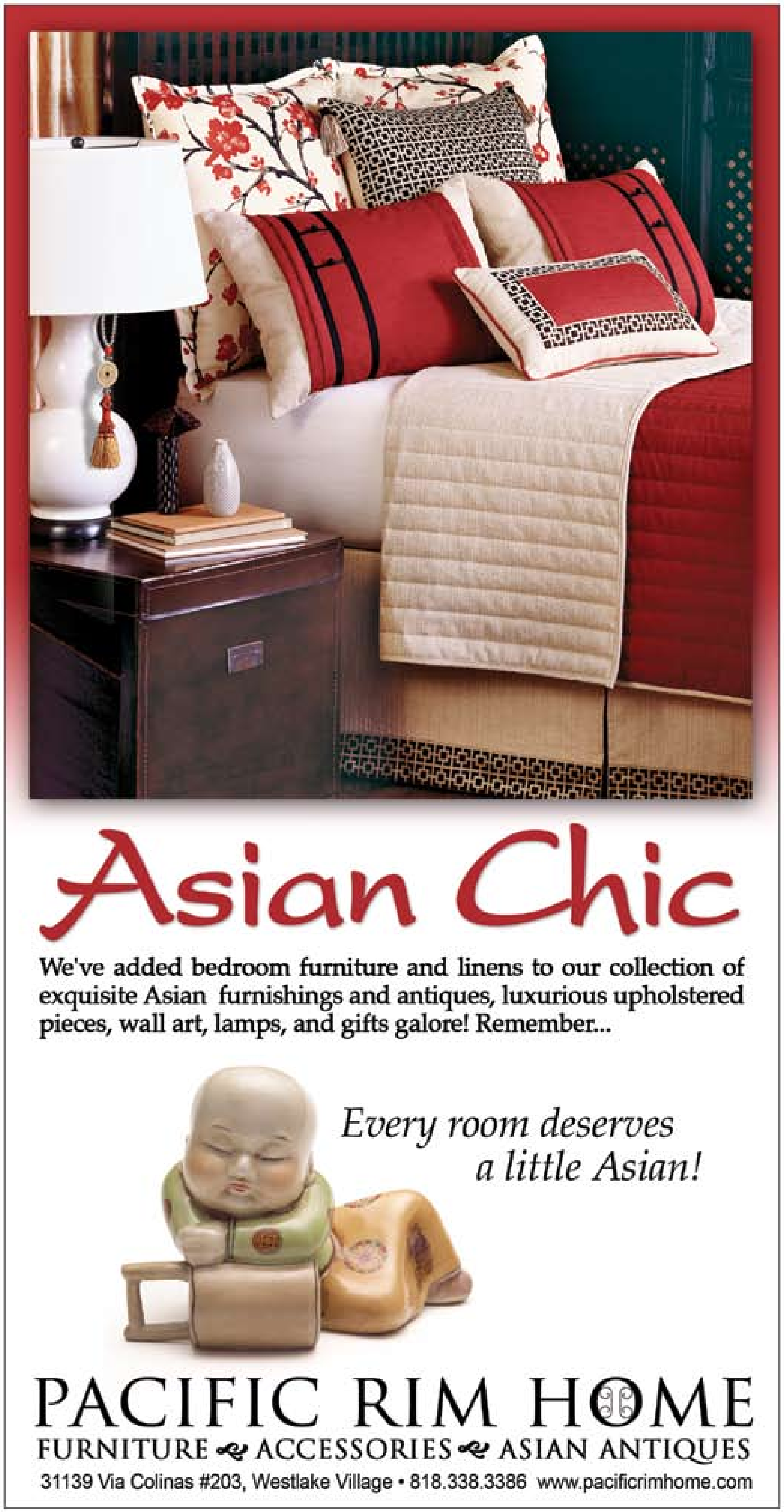
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The bold and the beautiful

Photos: Michael Owen Baker



Gift items include a vintage globe ($275), as well as postcard trays, bird candles and calligraphy brushes. Top, pillows (starting at $75) adorn an "olde" English sofa ($2,200).



Bright hues, exciting designs meet at Henry Road in Studio City

By Sue Doyle

Textile designer Paula Smail recalls growing up on Henry Road, where kids had the run of their neighbors' gardens, splashed in backyard pools and were under strict orders to be home by 5 p.m.

Hoping to capture the dynamic spirit of her South African neighborhood, Smail named her Studio City gift boutique after the small street that holds so many fond memories.

Painted an eye-catching bright blue,

Henry Road
3949 Laurelgrove Ave.,
Studio City
818-762-8966
www.henryroad.com.



"Some boutiques have rules. I do not have rules, except that I like the items," says owner Paula Smail, who opened the shop one year ago. "Some of it's old. Some is new. Some is handmade. Some is not. Some are eco-friendly items. Some are not."



Henry Road showcases a cheerful collection of new and vintage items, from whimsical lampshades and brilliantly hued pillows to antique perfume love charms and lustrous ceramics. There are items for every budget, like a 25-cent Wonder Bread clip or a $1,250 flowered wood print fashioned from 1930s wallpaper.

"Some boutiques have rules. I do not have rules, except that I like the items," says Smail, who opened the shop one year ago. "Some of it's old. Some is new. Some is handmade. Some is not. Some are eco-friendly items. Some are not."

The brightly colored textiles are designed by Smail, who never studied art in school and instead focused on law and economics and worked for years in corporate public relations.

Smail, who grew up in South Africa and lived in Paris, London and New York before moving to Los Angeles in 2002, said her life around the world has influenced her taste in color, prints and style.



Behind the bright-blue façade of the Henry Road boutique, Paula Smail offers an array of unique accessories, including the lampshades of her own design (top, starting at $175). Above, the flowered wood print hangs over an assortment of table accents.



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Gifts range from a traditional cheese serving set, top, to a $450 set of "knockdown" clowns from a 1940s-era carnival.

Her designs cover the pillows that spill from antique bins and adorn her beloved "olde English" sofa. They also find their way into festive tablecloths, vibrant tote bags and even quirky lampshades.

In addition to her own designs, Smail carries the works of up-and-coming artists and artisans.

"It changes things up all the time," Smail says.

Her favorite piece inside her shop is a vintage iron bed tucked in the store's corner and covered with 16 of her pillows.

It says, 'Come and lie on me and chill out,'" Smail says.

And just when you think that you've browsed the store stuffed with upholstered furniture, red-and-white striped French flower pitchers and antique rings, you turn your head and notice something else. Like the weathered carnival clowns from the 1940s swaying on a shelf or the perfect set of wood blocks stamped with letters of the alphabet.

Each piece is something you naturally pick up and study. It's a collection that makes you think.

"I have ended up with a store that I love," Smail says. "I have people who come by to visit and say, 'This store makes me happy.' And that's how it works."

Colorful furnishings, artwork and collectibles create a festive air.





Chill out

Picture this pitcher full of freshly squeezed OJ. Coordinating “Dotted Blue” and “Marine” pitcher and glasses, in handblown cobalt glass from Mexico. Pitcher $39.99, set of six glasses $49.99 at Novica, www.novica.com.

Summertime blues



Azure skies, pools of ultramarine — the soothing shades of blue are very much a part of the outdoor life. Add some touches of cobalt, cerulean or sapphire to your outdoor living.

—Terri Hunter-Davis



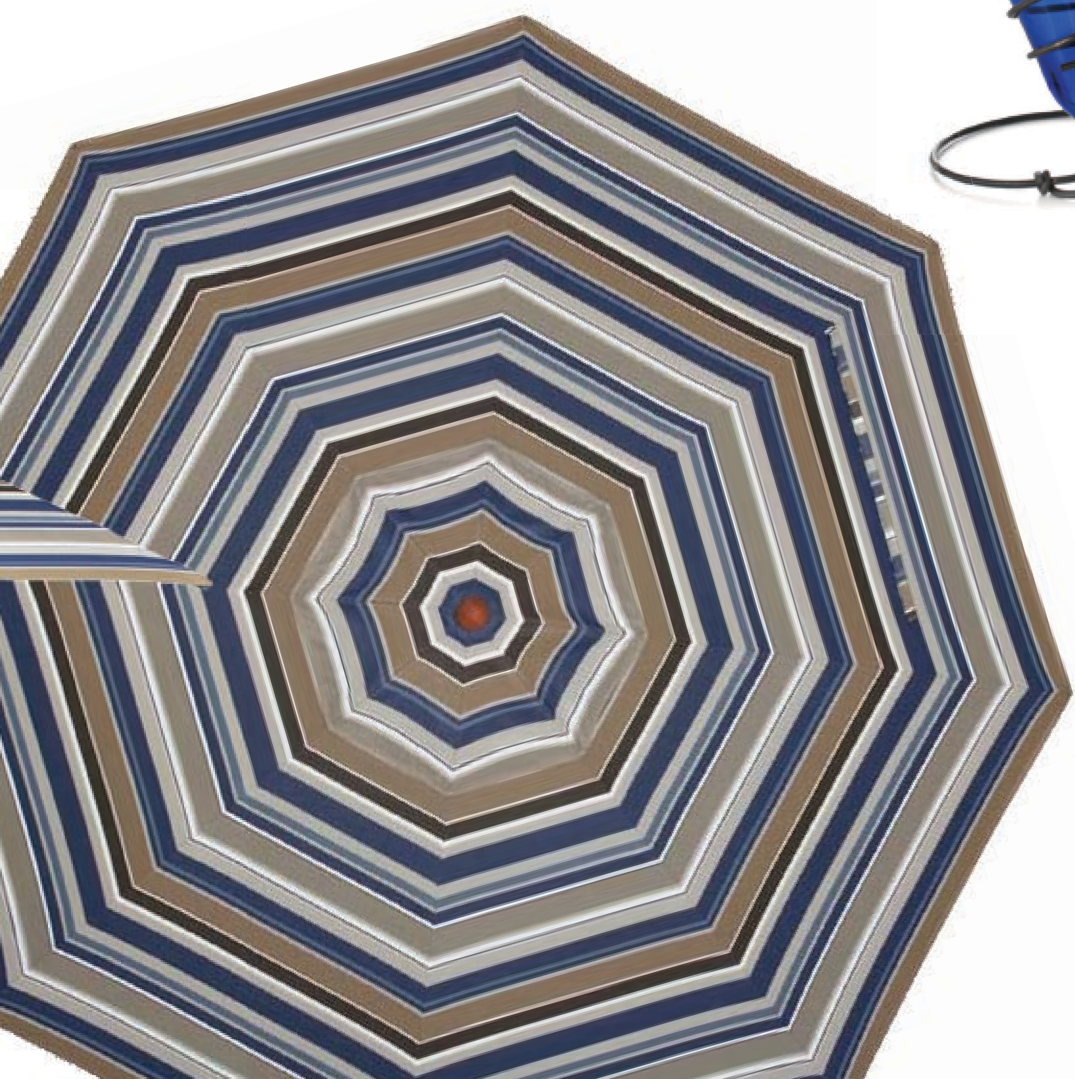
◀ Flower power

The chambray blue and bright yellow of these sunflower linens add a touch of Provence to the patio table. Sets of four placemats, $40, and four napkins, $32, at Sur la Table stores in Los Angeles, Glendale, Santa Monica and Thousand Oaks or www.surlatable.com.

Buddy system ▶

Adorn your patio table with bud vases that are a shining example of reuse. The base is made from a bedspring; the vases held wine in an earlier incarnation. $40 at www.uncommongoods.com.





◀ Cool colors, hot days

Retreat from the harsh rays under Crate and Barrel's 9-foot round umbrella, in fresh stripes of sapphire blue, cocoa, taupe and stone. Frame, cover and stand sold separately, $79.95-$199; order at local Crate and Barrel stores or online at www.crateandbarrel.com.

Sitting pretty

Gather 'round the pool or table in CB2's café chairs in sky blue. They're rust-resistant, sturdy welded steel with powdercoat finish. Also available in yellow and white. $99.95 at CB2 in Los Angeles, or online at www.cb2.com.





Table talk

Park your Blue Moon on Pottery Barn's ceramic cube table, in a glossy deep blue reminiscent of pools at Hearst Castle. Built-in handles make it easy to cart indoors once the weather turns. $149 at www.potterybarn.com.

Hooked on sunshine

Bask in the sun and wiggle your tootsies on Pottery Barn's round sundial outdoor rug in soothing shades of natural and blue. The hooked pile is soft underfoot, but made from mildew- and fade-resistant polypropylene. $249 at www.potterybarn.com.













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Modern renaissance

Contemporary remodel takes a '50s home back to the future

By Sandra Barrera





Clean lines and neutral colors create a contemporary yet elegant look in the living room, left and center, and the great room.

Photos by Jamie K. Fisher

Envisioning a mid-century modern motif for his second home in Trousdale Estates, an Arizona retiree turned to Erinn Valencich, a rising star in the world of interior design.

Valencich is known for creating spaces that are clean, contemporary and elegant. But warmth is another characteristic in the work of the Sherman Oaks-based designer, who plans to debut her own line of furniture through J. Alexander this fall. “I don’t like things too stark,” says Valencich, a TV host who also has a pair of shows in development. “I really like keeping it livable and comfortable. Cool, chic.”

Partnering with architect Christopher Richartz, Valencich was given free reign in transforming the ’50s-era brick-clad home in Beverly Hills into a modernist showpiece. The 425-acre tract was part of the Doheny Ranch until the 1950s, when it was sold to developer Paul Trousdale. He built single-family homes on large lots, many of which boast spectacular views of the L.A. basin.

However, this $1.5 million ground-up remodel is more secluded than most other properties in the neighborhood. And that was just the kind of setting the homeowner—a successful New York businessman now retired in Arizona—wanted for his California retreat.


DOMESTICITIES
Casa Italiana
The ELEMENTS of STYLE
50 APARTMENTS
today's city

"He loves to entertain on that California-style casual level where he's not throwing black-tie dinner parties but just inviting friends over to sit out by the fire pit enjoying good wine and good weather," says Valencich, who takes us to the heart of the renovation.

You really transformed the look of this place, inside and out.

Absolutely. Because the area of Trousdale is predominately mid-century, modern-style homes, we took this brick-clad traditional with low ceilings and blew it up. We made 12-foot walls of glass and brought that mid-century feeling back to the home. Still, I didn't want it to be too-cold-and-too-stark modern. My trademark is doing a contemporary space but making it very warm and inviting, then using a mix of materials.

Can you give us an example?

I wanted to give the powder room a real sexy, Hollywood-style glam. Powder rooms are definitely where you want to go wild because they're small and contained, and if you're entertaining, guests are going to go in there. I did black-and-white (floral) wallpaper and a black-and-white floor of concentric squares. I custom-designed the vanity for a slab glass sink from Kohler that's 3 inches thick. Then I mirrored the ceiling with a hanging pendant. It's pretty, sparkling and glamorous."

Do people tend to go for glamour when remodeling a second home?

Sometimes. Or they just want something different from what they're living in. (This homeowner) wanted a sexy home that feels like a modern hotel. It's clean and crisp, very indoor-outdoor living, which is great for entertaining. I wanted it to be light and airy so I also put in skylights wherever I could.

Did you use any cool new state-of-the-art technology?

Probably one of the coolest pieces of technology is in the master shower. We put in the Kohler DTV system, which completely controls your showering experience from



Left and below: Complementary black-and-white designs create "Hollywood-style glam" in the powder room.

Opposite and bottom: A doorway in the wall-size bookcase connects the bedroom and bathroom in the master suite.





Master bedroom photo by Adrian Anz; powder room and master bath photos by Jamie K. Fisher



water temperature to music to steam. Kohler's great for always pushing technology. All the fixtures in the house are from them for that reason. They've got great modern design.

Explain how you designed the master bathroom.

I used a lot of neutral tones but then mixed up the texture. I used a stingray-pattern ceramic tile and a marble countertop that has beautiful movements, very much like a sand dune. Above that we did an iridescent glass flanking the mirrors on each vanity. Again, a lot of tonal qualities but everything having a different texture, movement, reflective level so it doesn't all look the same.

Not a fan of sameness are you?

Personally, I hate walking through a house where every bathroom has the same tile. Its like, 'Come on guys! Did you get a good sale or did you just run out of creativity?' I mean, there are so many beautiful materials out there.

You reshaped the pool as part of the remodel?

The pool was a kidney-shaped, dark and funky pool. It had big succulents and lava rock hanging around it, which is definitely outdated. So, we cut that out. We actually gained a lot of room in the back yard by making the pool rectangular.

I also did a Baja shelf, which just gives people more lounging room. It really changed the entire focus of the back yard and made it twice the size just by redoing the pool and changing the landscape. There were huge cypress trees and pine trees all along the property. It made it very dark and closed in. So, we took out all those trees and completely opened it up.

You also opened up the kitchen to the great room.

In L.A., that's what everybody wants because the lifestyle is so much more casual and entertaining is loose. People don't use their living rooms. They're really more into the family room or kitchen.



What kinds of texture did you give the kitchen?

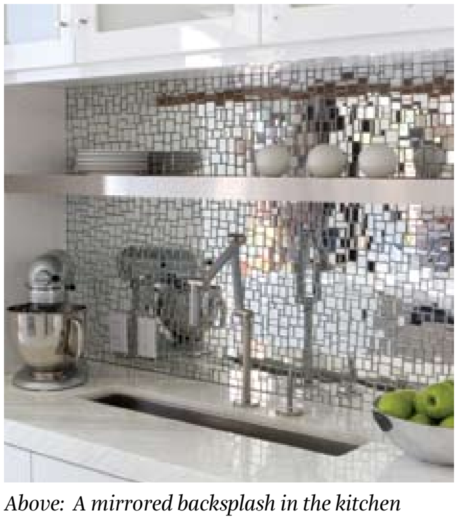
The kitchen is in a gray wood. I did a mirrored backsplash over the entertainment sink. You don't see a lot of mirrored elements in kitchens today but back in the mid-century, at the time when most of the houses in the Trousdale Estates were going up, there were. So, that's a little bit of a throwback.

Did you usually research the era before starting on the project?

I don't do a ton of period research because we're making something designed to feel current now. But having gone to those homes and also being in the industry, you take bits and pieces from the genres and eras you like.

Where do you recommend people who are thinking about remodeling a second home start?

Start by looking through magazines and books and online. Print out pictures of rooms that you like. It's really that simple. Once you gather enough images together of kitchens, of bathrooms, of design elements, of bookcases then you can start seeing what's going to fit your space and how you can adapt it.



Above: A mirrored backsplash in the kitchen reflects the entertainment-friendly space in the great room.

Opposite: A combination of textures adds to the appeal of the The wrap-around fireplace in the great room.

Are you working on any second home projects at the moment?

I've just started another one in the Venice Canals. The homeowner is from Denver, but she just loves the California bungalow feel. She really wants to play it up. So, again, here's a house that very much represents the area the second home is in. She's getting that aspect of the California lifestyle that drew her here in the first place.

Great room photo by Adrian Anz; fireplace and kitchen photos by Jamie K. Fisher



Home & away

A SoCal couple creates a vacation haven amid Solvang's vineyards

By Barbara Jones

Photos by Dean Musgrove

The sprawling ranch-style house has 18-foot ceilings, sumptuous furnishings, and a kitchen that any cook would covet. Yet for Debbie and Steve Lenzi, the favorite feature of their vacation home is the sweeping view of the Santa Ynez Valley that is visible from every room. "I told Steve I had to be able to see vineyards," Debbie says, pointing through a bedroom window at the vista beyond. "Look at that hill there, and there. Vineyards!"

The view is about the only thing that has not changed since the Lenzis bought the four-bedroom house two years ago. They're nearing the end of a remodeling project that transformed what was simply an attractive house in the hills above Solvang into a stunning replica of a Tuscan villa. Warm hues and Italian tile have replaced vanilla walls and nondescript flooring, while custom lighting and rich wood accents unify the spaces throughout the 5,400-square-foot house built a decade ago. "This was the first time we'd done anything like this," Steve says. "We didn't realize the scope of what we were going to be doing."

The Lenzis began a search for a wine-country house about six years ago, looking ahead to Steve's retirement as an executive for the Automobile Club of Southern California. They were living in Orange County at the time and



The richly appointed family room, above, offers stunning views of the valley and visiting wildlife. Italian tile and a five-step process that "aged" the walls helped create the feeling of a Tuscan villa. Accents are from Dennees of Santa Ynez.





spending their holidays in a three-bedroom Lake Tahoe house that became their primary residence after Steve retired in June 2008. By that time, they'd scoured the Napa and Sonoma valleys before shifting their search to the Central Coast area where Debbie grew up. They bought the Solvang house a year later and launched the top-to-bottom remodel (donating the discarded cabinets, doors and hardware to Habitat for Humanity).

They started with a vision Debbie had for the house, one enhanced with ideas culled from magazines, brochures and advertisements. She collected a folder of clippings of rooms she loved and details she admired. She even taped the photo from a magazine on the library wall as a reminder of how the room would someday look. Steve was deeply involved in the planning, offering suggestions that Debbie admits led to some lively discussions.

Still, they ultimately agreed on every









element of the renovation—from the hidden rope lighting that softly illuminates the coffered dining room ceiling, to the walk-in shower in the master bath, to the warming oven built into one of two granite-topped kitchen islands. "Everything we do," Debbie says, "we do together."

Because the couple was relatively new to the Solvang area, they turned to neighbors whose homes they admired for references and recommendations—the key to the success of their remodeling project. "Of all the lessons learned, that's the most important," says Steve. "We didn't have any of the nightmare experiences you so often hear about.



Warm hues unite the open spaces and highlight the scenery outdoors. Local blacksmith Hans Duus designed and created the chandeliers that adorn the living room, right, and dining room, opposite.



Details throughout the house include custom lighting and a bullnose finish on every edge. The dining room table was carved from a single piece of wood by artisans at The Pine Guild in Tarzana.

We found people who were honest and dependable. They weren't just contractors, they were craftsmen."

With Steve teaching a leadership class at the private Sierra Nevada College in Lake Tahoe, most of the oversight of the renovation fell to Debbie. She met with local contractor Matt Loudon, managed the budget and tracked every detail. A former Realtor, she also decorated the home, finding treasures in the home-décor stores that pepper her newly adopted valley.

Debbie and Steve still have a couple of projects ahead of them, including their master bedroom and the office where Debbie





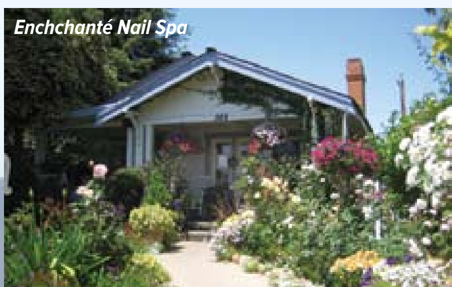
Wine valley sojourn

During weekend trips and holidays, Debbie and Steve Lenzi love exploring the area around their vacation retreat in Solvang. They've discovered a favored winery or two—the Santa Ynez Valley was the setting for the 2004 hit movie "Sideways"—along with fanciful boutiques, tasty restaurants, and breathtaking scenery. During a recent interview, the couple offered their favorite places for relaxation and fun. And since the Lenzis are relatively new to the area, we've added a few suggestions of our own.

SOLVANG

This quaint Danish-themed city provides a good home base for visitors spending a long weekend. Wine-tasting rooms, fragrant bakeries, and well-stocked cheese stores are tucked among the motels and souvenir shops in the city square. Debbie likes to stop at **Nodding Place**, which features exquisite hand-stitched quilts, and **Pearls of Provence**, crammed with colorful textiles and ceramics.

Just down the street is **Enchanté Nail Spa**, where relaxing massages and manicures take pampering to a new level. And next to the post office, celebrity chef Bradley Ogden recently opened **Root 246**, a popular restaurant drawing raves for its New American cuisine.


Enchchanté Nail Spa

SANTA YNEZ

Three miles east of Solvang is Santa Ynez, a charming town with stores that are magnets for local residents. **Dennees of Santa Ynez** (there's also a store in Redondo Beach) is chock-full of ornate furnishings and accessories, while **Sage** stocks contemporary linens, dishware, and gifts. Debbie also has unearthed treasures at **Home Design and Consign**, tucked into the corner of an industrial park. And the walls of the Lenzi home are adorned with the work of nature photographer Philip Gerlach, who has an eponymous gallery on Sagunto Street.


Downtown Solvang

Two of the town's restaurants, **Mattie's Tavern** and **Red Barn Steak House**, are local landmarks, while the **Vineyard House** offers a good alternative for Sunday brunch. (The Hitching Post restaurant featured in "Sideways" is in **Buellton**, a town just west of Solvang.) And while the region boasts wineries galore, Debbie and Steve's favorite is **Roblar**, an upscale venue along Highway 154 that features a tasting room, café and even a cooking school where the couple hopes to someday hone their culinary skills.

Driving between Solvang and Santa Ynez, you'll notice a massive building alongside the road. It's the **Chumash Casino Resort**, which is packed day and night with gamblers trying their luck at the 2,000 slots and video machines, along with blackjack, poker and other games of chance.

LOS OLIVOS

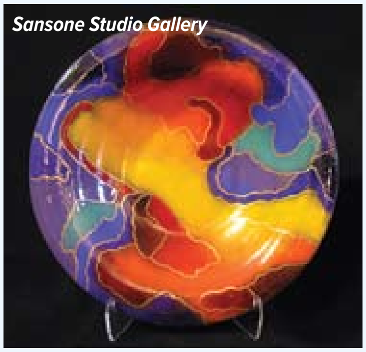
The five-mile drive between Solvang and Los Olivos offers views of rolling hills, lush equestrian ranches, and sprawling vineyards. The town's main streets are lined with wine-tasting rooms for aficionados who are short on time or don't want to get


Dennees of Santa Ynez


Roblar wines

GETTING THERE

The drive between the San Fernando and Santa Ynez valleys takes about two hours, depending on traffic. Take the 101 Freeway north to Santa Barbara, where you have two options for the second leg of your journey. You can continue on the 101 for about 40 miles to Buellton, then head east for six miles on Highway 246. The alternative is to take Highway 154, a two-lane road that winds through San Marcos Pass and past Lake Cachuma, a reservoir with picnic sites and campgrounds. Either route offers beautiful scenery and the opportunity for new experiences in the Golden State.



behind the wheel after sampling their favorite merlot. While you miss the experience of visiting the vineyard, you'll still get the same expert advice and recommendations about color, smell, and taste.

Take time to detour into the small galleries that pepper the storefronts. **Sansone Studio Gallery** features brilliantly colored enamel-on-copper artwork and sculptures, each one original and unique. The works of dozens of the region's artists are showcased at **Gallery Los Olivos**, which rotates the exhibits three times a year, providing a new experience during each visit. *—BJ*







Debbie and Steve Lenzi love to entertain family and friends, who stay in one of two guest rooms, top.

works as a consultant to the insurance industry. They want to build an outdoor kitchen and fireplace in the backyard and replace much of the lawn with hardscaping to reduce water use. They plan to leave most of their eight acres as open space for the deer, birds and other "critters" that make their home on the oak-dotted hillsides, although Steve is eyeing one slope for a mini-vineyard.

Because the renovation was so extensive, the Lenzis are just now beginning to appreciate their Central Coast home. They're able to spend time exploring the countryside, often with relatives and friends who love to visit the region for its wine-tasting rooms and laid-back lifestyle. "We've grown to love this house," Debbie says. "It feels like home."



Luxe linens

High thread-count sheets don't always add up to premium bedding

By Wendy Neri

"Percale has a smooth and cool finish. Sateen allows the shine of the yarn to show through and creates the depth of color."

—Liz Barbetelli, Owner E. Braun and Co. Beverly Hills

You've just returned from a luxury resort or cruise, and there's one thing you can't get out of your mind: those sheets! If the hotel was a Ritz-Carlton or a Four Seasons, the sheets were likely Frette, the venerable Italian company known for its premium linen. If you were aboard a Regent Seven Seas cruise, the sheets likely were Anichini, another Italian purveyor of luxury linens. But thankfully, you don't have to travel afar to cocoon yourself in such serene luxury.

Although most high-end sheets come from overseas, there are specialty shops and boutiques all over the country (and the Web) that specialize in them. All it takes is a bit of research, some knowledge of the lingo, and perhaps more than a bit of discretionary income, and you'll be sleeping like kings and queens in no time. We'll uncover the first two elements, but the rest is up to you.

Although some purists will sleep only on silk, linen, or even cashmere, the majority of luxury bedding is made from 100 percent Egyptian cotton. And while the world's finest cotton is grown in the rich soil around the Nile, Egyptian cotton doesn't necessarily have to come from Egypt. Of more importance than its origin is the length of the individual fibers, or staples. Generally, the longer the staple, the better the feel, or "hand," as they say in the industry.

Cotton that complies with the Egyptian standards of quality results in the softest, most lustrous sheets you can buy. In fact, just one sweep of your hand across these comfy confections will tell you these aren't the sheets your mother stocked up on at the department store white sales. That's not to say that you can't get a set of quality sheets at





"Grand Flora" bedding from Yves Delorme

department stores like Macy's or Bed, Bath & Beyond, but for true luxury sheets, you need to go to a specialty store.

That said, the first thing you need to do when shopping for high-end sheets is put to rest any notions about thread counts. Contrary to popular belief, a higher thread count does not necessarily mean higher quality. "In the true luxury market, thread count has never meant much of anything," says Jennifer Marks, editor-in-chief of industry publication Home Textiles Today. "What makes a fine sheet is the quality of the cotton, the craftsmanship of the weaving, and the manner of the finishing process," she says. "Thread count as we've come to know it is basically a marketing ploy that came into play once sheets began to be sourced offshore," Marks adds. "The fact that over the past few years we've seen 400-, 500- and 600-count sheets turning up in discount department stores tells you all you need to know."

So how much does it cost to outfit your bed in the very best? For a typical queen-size ensemble—a top sheet, fitted sheet and two standard cases—expect to pay at least $600 to $800 total (pieces sold separately; most high-end sheets do not come in sets). Of course, that price can vary, depending on pattern, embellishments on the hemstitch, finish, etc. Italian company Sferra recently upped the ante with its Giza 45 line, made from the finest cotton grown along the Nile. At $115 for a pillow sham, and about $650 for a queen top sheet, it's clear this is top of-the-line sheeting.

"The advantage of luxury bedding is the higher quality. The sheets are softer and more stylized, the sewing is more intricate," says Liz Barbetelli, owner of E. Braun and Co. Beverly Hills, which specializes in bed, bath and table linens.

After more than two decades in the textile business, Barbetelli is familiar with the mills that supply her store on North Camden Drive, and the weaving and finishing processes used by each. She speaks knowledgeably about yarns and construction, finishes and embellishments—all elements involved in the design of a sophisticated and well-dressed bed. The store has interior designers on staff to advise its customers, another difference between shopping at a high-end linen house and a traditional department store. "It's like the difference between a Chevy and a Mercedes Benz," Barbetelli says. "You get what you pay for."

A burgeoning trend is the use of organic cottons and green fabrics such as bamboo and other wood fibers, although only a few of the luxury manufacturers currently offer lines using these materials. But the main reason to go green when it comes to sheets is purely "conscience" rather than personal comfort, says Marks.

"There is no inherent difference in performance, although bamboo advocates would argue that bamboo gets softer with more washings," she says. "That is true, but most bamboo is mixed with cotton and other fibers, which tend to break down with more washings." But whether you go green or stick with the eternally popular creams and whites, there is one potential problem with luxury sheets: You might never want to leave your bed.



"Flamenco" sheets from Peacock Alley

Cheat sheet

Don't know your percale from your pima? Here's a list of definitions to help you find your dream sheets.

COMBED COTTON — Cotton that has been blended and cleaned, with short staples and dirt removed, resulting in a stronger, finer, smoother fabric.

HAND — The "feel" of a fabric.

EGYPTIAN COTTON — The best-quality, longest-staple cotton available is grown in Egypt as well as a variety of other countries.

PERCALE — A type of weave, similar to a tight basket weave, that results in sheets with a crisp touch.

PIMA — A generic term for the type of cotton grown in the United States, Australia, and Peru.

SATEEN — A type of weave that reflects light and results in sheets with a glossy, satiny feel.

SUPIMA — A licensed trademarked name (and abbreviation for "superior Pima") used to promote textile products made from 100 percent American-grown Pima cotton.

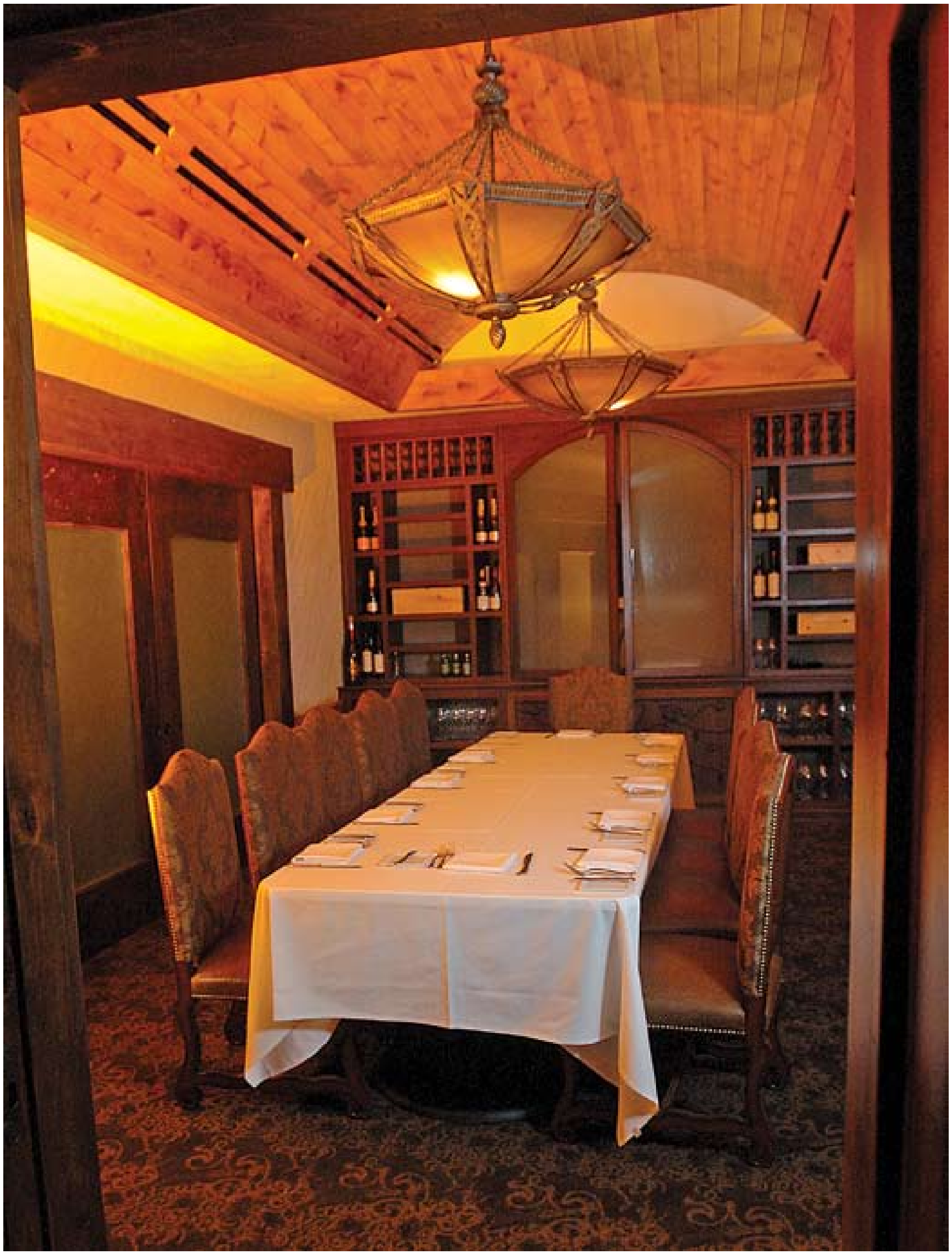
THREAD COUNT — A measure of how many threads are woven into one square inch of fabric.

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Hitting the Brix

An eclectic menu and expansive wine list create a trendy South Bay oasis

By Melissa Heckscher



Visiting Brix is like taking a vacation, says general manager Andy Alexander, who oversees the contemporary menu and extensive wine list.

Photos: Robert Casillas

If you ask him, General Manager Andy Alexander will tell you: Brix, a trendy spot in Hermosa Beach, is first and foremost a restaurant.

But wine connoisseurs may beg to differ.

Named after the Brix system of measuring the sugar content of grapes and wine, Brix boasts a 300-bottle in-house wine list plus 900 additional bottles at the adjacent Brix Wine shop — where customers can buy wine at retail price and enjoy at the restaurant for a $20 corkage fee.

"Last night we had people drive from the San Fernando Valley, Agoura Hills and Pasadena to come down and sample our food and to taste the eclectic wines we have on the list," says Alexander, formerly of Trump National in Palos Verdes and DaVinci's restaurant in Long Beach. "It's a unique journey between wine and food that the likes of the South Bay really hasn't been open to before."

Want a wine from Lebanon? You've got it. Slovakia? No problem. While there are plenty of California and Western European varietals, but it's the "new world" wines that Alexander says attracts the connoisseurs.

"In some ways, when people come here, it's like a vacation," he says. "It's an oasis."

Brix's chef Carlos Olivera (formerly of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel) prepares a contemporary American menu that's equally eclectic. Highlights include the kurobuta pork loin chop served with white truffle macaroni and cheese and a sherry thyme jus; braised short ribs with potato puree and roasted garden vegetables; and the Brix surf and turf, featuring diver scallops, braised oxtail and a smoked tomato vinaigrette.

Prices range from $15 to $48 a plate. Five- and seven-course tasting menus are also available for $60 and $80, respectively.

"Every single night we have people who say, 'Thank you for opening up an establishment like this,'" Alexander says, adding that the wait staff is carefully trained on which wines pair well with the various items on the menu.

It's true. Located in the Hermosa Beach Pavilion, a two-story building it shares with a fitness club and a smattering of retail shops, Brix is a far cry from the rowdy bar and club scene just a few blocks west in downtown Hermosa Beach.

It's a step in the right direction for the area, says Alexander, a 19-year veteran of the South Bay.

"As much as we live in an extremely casual environment, when people walk into a restaurant, they step up a notch — they choose to," he says. "People can walk in here with jeans, but they're not walking in here with flip-flops."

It's this style of what Alexander calls "casual fine dining" that attracts Brix's 30- and 40-something crowd of both upscale beachgoers and curious out-of-towners.

In fact, since its opening a year ago, the 8,000-square-foot eatery has become one of the South Bay's most sought-after fine-dining (and wine-sipping) destinations — a trend most evident by its bustling Thursday night wine tastings.

In designing the concept of the restau-

Tastings offer laid-back approach to wine

Along with its daily happy hours and Thursday ladies' nights, Brix also holds wine tastings every Thursday and Saturday at Brix Wine next door.

Each tasting features a different breed or region of wine. And those interested in attending are notified via e-mail what kind of wine will be tasted on what day.

"It's a lot of fun," Brix Wine manager Chris Hennessey says. "People learn a lot, and they get to enjoy wine."

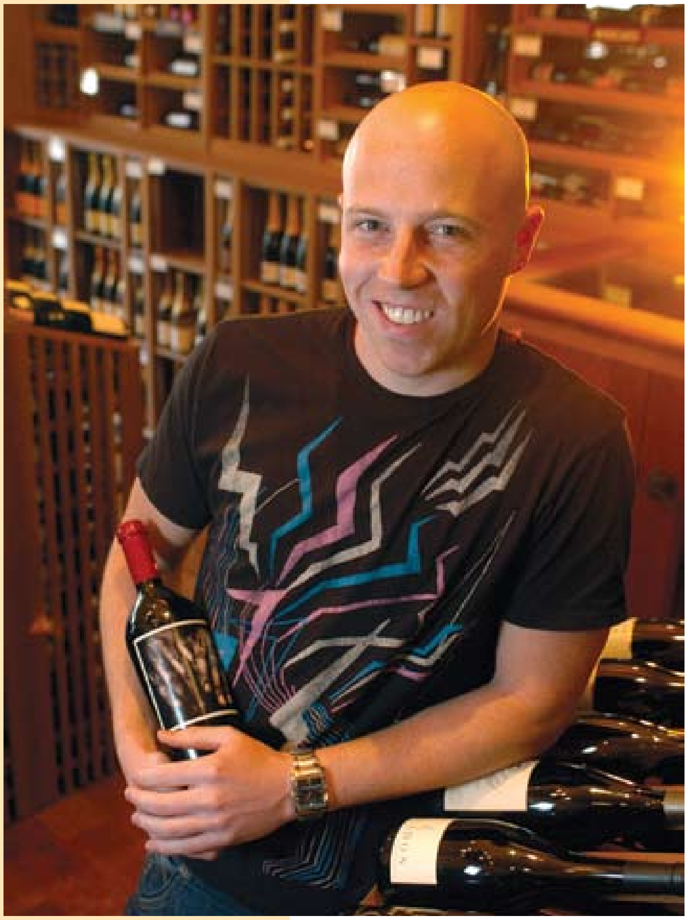
A 25-year-old Hermosa Beach resident, Hennessey came to Brix from the Wine Merchant in Beverly Hills.

Moving from the "suited-up sommelier" side of the wine business to the more casual jeans-and-sneakers ambiance of the South Bay was easy. All he had to do, he says, was "make wine laid back."

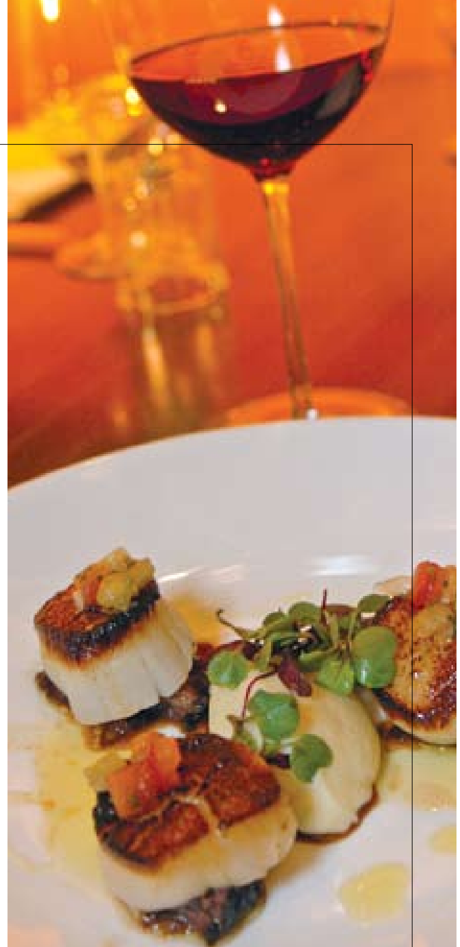
"It's about taking the atmosphere and making it comfortable. It's understanding what they want, not what you want them to have," he says.

The bottle selection ranges from popular California, French and Italian blends to more obscure Slovakian, Croatian and Lebanese wines. Prices range from $8 to more than $700.

"You could spend hundreds of dollars or you could spend $20," Hennessey says. "Either way, it just comes down to what you like."



Chris Hennessey manages Brix Wine, which has an inventory of 900 bottles of wine, ranging from $8 to $700.



Brix Surf and Turf with Smoked Tomato Vinaigrette

Serves 4

Smoked Tomato Vinaigrette

1 cup apple wood chips
1 large tomato
¼ cup olive oil
1 tablespoon chopped chives
1 tablespoon chopped shallot
¼ sherry vinegar
Freshly ground salt and pepper, to taste

Soak apple wood chips in water for 5 minutes. Place chips in smoker and allow to smoke. Blanche and peel tomato. Place it in smoker for 2 minutes. Remove from smoker and dice. Puree smoked tomato with remaining ingredients and set vinaigrette aside until ready to use.

Braised Oxtail

1 pound oxtail
Grapeseed oil
1 cup red wine
1 cup port wine
8 cups beef or veal stock
1 cup diced carrots
2 yellow onions
1 star anise
4 bay leaves
1 tablespoon fresh thyme
3 tablespoons tomato paste
4 morel mushrooms
Garnish: Microgreens

Preheat oven to 225° F. Sear oxtail in oil. Add wines and simmer until reduced. Add remaining ingredients and bake for 4 hours. De-bone and let meat rest 5 minutes. Keep sauce warm. Soak mushrooms in warm water for 5 minutes. Remove stems and add to oxtail sauce 2 minutes before serving.

Seared Scallops

4 jumbo diver or sea scallops, cleaned
3 tablespoons grapeseed oil
2 tablespoons unsalted butter
½ teaspoon thyme

Sear scallops in oil. Add butter and thyme and baste until golden brown. Set aside and keep warm.

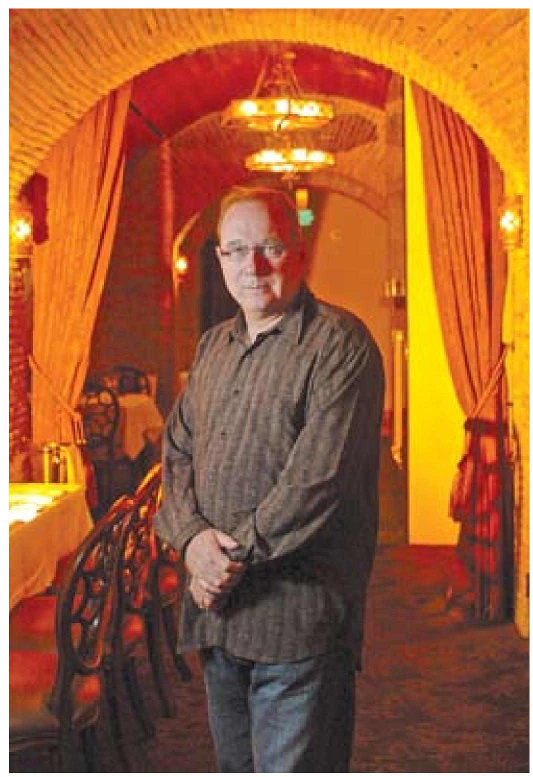
To serve: Arrange 4 tablespoons braised oxtail on a plate or deep dish and top each with a scallop. Drizzle with vinaigrette and garnish.

rant, Brix owner Gene Shook's goal was to offer a fine dining experience at a more reasonable price point.

"There are a lot of great chain restaurants where you can get a great meal but the ingredients, the ambiance, the plates, the settings — it's not the same," says Shook, formerly of the Stillwater Bistro in Orange County. He also owns the Hermosa Pavilion building. "Then there are the very high-end, very expensive restaurants where you could easily walk out spending $1,000."

"What I wanted to do," he continues, "was bring a price point closer to the chains with a quality closer to the nice restaurants."

He didn't spare any expense on ambiance. The dimly lit space features stone fireplaces, vaulted wood ceilings, leather seats, brick archways and Venetian plaster walls. To amp up the social element of the restaurant, the Brix bar hosts a happy hour from 4-7 p.m. daily, featuring food and drink specials — as well as ladies night specials on Thursdays and biweekly wine tastings.



Owner Gene Shook says the reasonable menu prices at Brix belie the high quality of the fare.

Bar manager Blake Donaldson calls the Brix bar a "sophisticated" venue for singles.

"This is certainly not the Hermosa Beach scene, and we don't want that," says Donaldson, an alumni of other South Bay hotspots including Rock 'n Fish, Shade and the former Micci's restaurant in Manhattan Beach. A local bartending celebrity, he also has 39 drink-making videos on Youtube.com and his own Web site (www.thedrinkchef.com).

"What we want is people who enjoy the finer things," he adds. "That's why we have so many amazing wines by the glass."



The Antioxidant

Serves 1

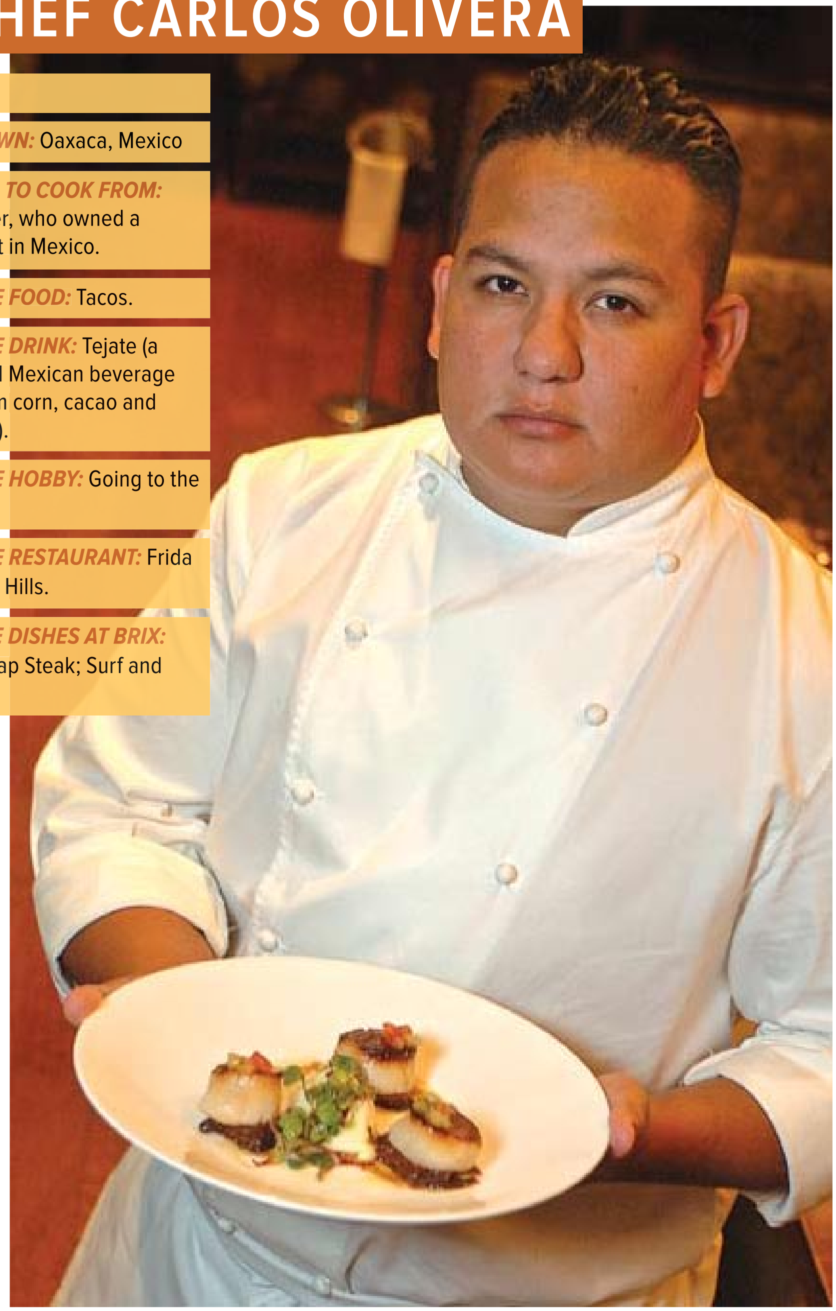
Acai (pronounced "ah-SIGH-ee") is the national fruit of Brazil—and purportedly one of the healthiest fruits you can eat. In liquor form, it tastes like sweetened vodka.

1½ ounces Veev Acai Spirit
½ ounce pomegranate liqueur
2 ounces pomegranate juice
Superfine sugar (for glass rim)

Mix first three ingredients in cocktail shaker filled with ice. Shake and serve in a chilled, sugar-rimmed martini glass.

SPOTLIGHT ON...

CHEF CARLOS OLIVERA



AGE: *28*

HOMETOWN: Oaxaca, Mexico

LEARNED TO COOK FROM: His mother, who owned a restaurant in Mexico.

FAVORITE FOOD: Tacos.

FAVORITE DRINK: Tejate (a traditional Mexican beverage made from corn, cacao and cinnamon).

FAVORITE HOBBY: Going to the beach.

FAVORITE RESTAURANT: Frida in Beverly Hills.

FAVORITE DISHES AT BRIX: Rib-eye Cap Steak; Surf and Turf.



RESTAURANT	Brix@1601 1601 Pacific Coast Highway Hermosa Beach 310/698-0740 www.brix1601.com
RESERVATIONS RECOMMENDED?	Yes
DINNER WITH WINE FOR TWO	About $100

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—Holly Berecz

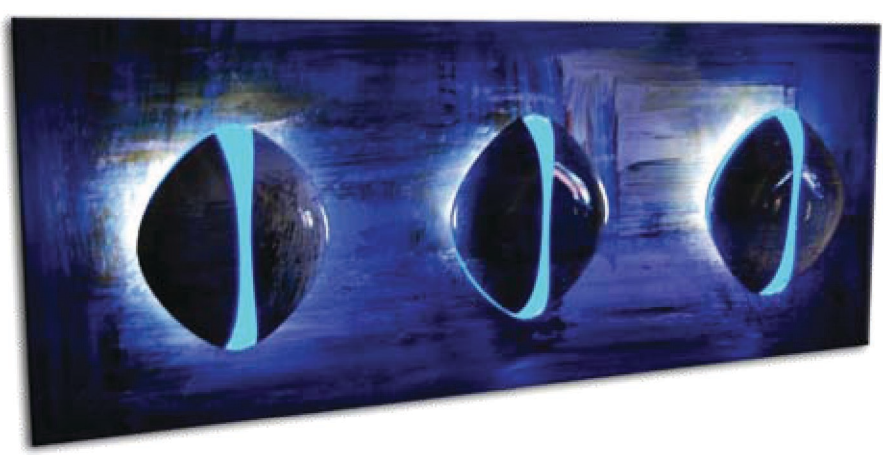


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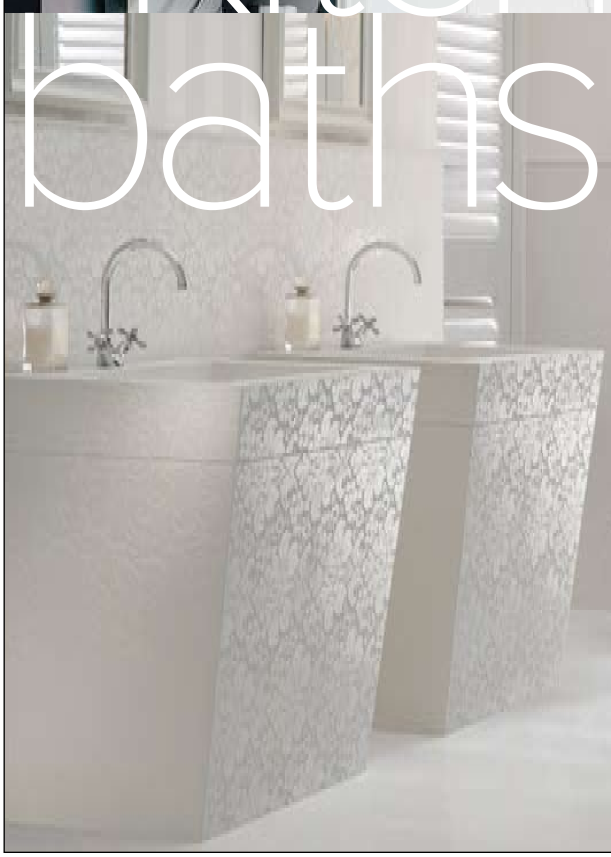
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Philanthropist Nancy Davis and designer Tommy Hilfiger, right, co-chaired the 16th annual Race to Erase MS, which drew Hollywood luminaries like director Penny Marshall, below.





Celebs rock her world

Nancy Davis' annual gala raises $2 million to fight MS

The crowd at the Hyatt Regency Century Plaza rocked to the music of the Eagles during a star-studded gala that raised $2 million to fight multiple sclerosis.

Nancy Davis and designer Tommy Hilfiger co-chaired the 16th annual Race to Erase MS, a ticketed cocktail reception attended by such luminaries as Oscar-winning actor Dustin Hoffman and singer-songwriters Avril Lavigne and Jewel. In addition to the Eagles, pop singer Michelle Branch performed at the May 8 gala, themed "Rock to Erase MS."

The other guests included actresses Angie Harmon, Anne Heche, Virginia Madsen, Elke Sommer and Sela Ward, actors Jon Lovitz and Jeremy Piven, director Penny Marshall and Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

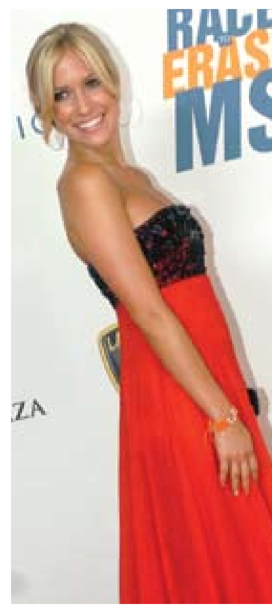
Boosting the night's tally toward the $2 million mark was the auction of a 2009 Lamborghini Gallardo sports car for $270,000. Personalities Tom Arnold and Nancy O'Dell also auctioned off luxury vacations, autographed sports memorabilia, a week-long cruise for eight on a yacht in the Caribbean and tickets to the "American Idol" finale.

Proceeds from the live and silent auctions benefit the Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis and its Center Without Walls. The network of seven research centers works on finding treatments and a cure for MS.

Davis, the daughter of the late billionaire Marvin Davis, was just 33 when she was diagnosed 18 years ago with the chronic neurological disease. Since then, she's raised more than $30 million for research and treatment programs.

"The Nancy Davis Foundation for Multiple Sclerosis wanted to build a winning team in The Race to Erase MS so we sought the best and the brightest throughout the world to create The Nancy Davis Center Without Walls," said Davis, now 52.









Guests at the MS fund-raiser included, clockwise from top, comedian Jon Lovitz, actress Kristin Cavallari, actor Shemar Moore and his mother, Marilyn, and Nancy Davis' son, Brandon.

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Berendina Maazel

Looking at her interpretations of sunlit landscapes, whimsical animals and brilliant flowers, you'd never guess that Tarzana artist Berendina Maazel has spent nearly all of her life in agonizing pain. Her hands and body crippled by the rheumatoid arthritis that struck when she was 17, the spirited octogenarian nevertheless has pursued a successful artistic career. Since 1996, the widow of renowned concert pianist Marvin Maazel has exhibited dozens of her watercolor and acrylic paintings at Los Angeles Orthopaedic Hospital, donating the proceeds from their sale to fund the treatment of disadvantaged children. Several of her paintings currently hang in the hospital's newly opened Renee and Meyer Luskin Children's Clinic. "It is exciting for me to be able to use my talents to help the children," Maazel says. "That I am able to help those less fortunate than myself has made my battle against rheumatoid arthritis seem insignificant in comparison because many of the children at the hospital lead daily fights for their lives. This alone has provided me with the inspiration to join their cause."



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